The Idea(l) of White British Benevolence

"Breaking the Chains" and the 2007 Bicentennial of Abolition

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> What we remember is defined by what we choose to forget, and how we choose to remember is defined by how we choose to ignore. - Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*

In October 2000, the Runnymede Trust – an independent think-tank committed to the promotion of racial justice in Britain – published *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*. Backed by the British Labour administration and launched by Home Secretary Jack Straw, the focus of *The Parekh Report* was to assess the contemporary condition of multi-ethnic Britain and to propose strategies for dealing with racial discrimination and disadvantage, thereby helping Britain become a more "confident and vibrant multi-cultural society at ease with its rich diversity." [1] The report argued that despite widespread investment in and promotion of the idea of Britishness as an inclusive and accessible identity, various elements within British society served to limit the acceptance of racialized citizens, and to perpetuate a conflation of Britishness with racial whiteness. [2] Popular narratives of British history were identified as one problematic contributor to this narrow and exclusive idea of national identity; thus, in order to reconstitute the meaning of Britishness and to facilitate the achievement of a nation comfortable with – and even embracing of – its diversity, *The Parekh Report* recommended that the historical narratives used to shape and inform British national identity ought to be critically reconsidered. [3]

One important aspect of British history concerns the nation's role in Atlantic slavery and its abolition. The Atlantic slave trade existed between the 16th and 19th centuries, and involved the enslavement of over 12 million African peoples. Between the 1730s and early 1800s, Britain fully dominated the trade, responsible for enslaving an estimated three million Africans for the production of sugar and other goods in the nation's Caribbean colonies. In 1807, an act of British parliament banned Britain's further participation in the slave trade; twenty-six years later, in 1833, another act abolished slavery itself in most British colonies. For

enslaved populations in the British Caribbean, these acts arguably marked an important historical moment; however, the actual conditions of abolition itself – the replacement of slavery with systems of apprenticeship and indentured labour, for example – are the subject of considerable debate.[4] Furthermore, as historian Madge Dresser points out, the abolition acts of the nineteenth century did not serve to initiate discussion over Britain's paradoxical position as "champion of both human liberty and slave trading."[5] Instead, Britain's self-congratulatory celebration of abolition allowed for an elision of important moral and ethical questions engendered by the nation's long and profitable participation in Atlantic slavery. As Britain quickly moved to celebrate its own role in abolition, the memory of the many ways in which Britain benefitted from slavery and the slave trade was largely forgotten.

The Commemorative Wreath, a collection of poetry published in 1834 to pay tribute to the glory and good nature of the British, aptly illustrates the way in which the meaning and memory of slavery was denied by that of abolition. As the writer of "On Negro Emancipation" wrote,

> Yes Britain! Who can boast like thee
> Of all that's good, and wise, and free?…
> Justice at length asserts her sway
> On Britain dawns a brighter day…
> England conscious England now
> Has washed this stain from off her brow…
> And Britain to the world shall be
> An *Emblem* of true *Liberty*![6]

Throughout this poem – and, indeed, this collection – the moral capital accrued through Britain's apparently selfless act of abolition is continuously invoked to exculpate the nation from any guilt incurred by their protracted involvement in slavery, and the significance of abolition is celebrated not for the expected improvements made for enslaved peoples, but rather for the ways in which this act reinforces a particular ideal of British identity. The achievement of abolition thus enabled a form of strategic denial, wherein the memory of slavery was disowned as the nation moved to invest itself in what I am characterizing as the idea(l) of white British benevolence. This idea – or rather, ideal – suggests that abolition was the gift of a charitable white British nation, rather than an act pursued as a means to somehow rectify centuries of exploitation and abuse. Britain was portrayed, then, as a generous benefactor, with little thought given to the fact

that it was the actions of the British themselves that created the situation in which they were able to 'give' enslaved peoples 'freedom.'[7]

The emphasis on Britain's role in abolition, and the corresponding distancing from its participation in slavery, has persisted with remarkable tenacity, leading historian Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace to comment that, outside of academic circles, it was possible to speak of Britain's role in slavery as a 'secret' history into the twenty-first century.[8] For those Britons who were aware of and concerned with Britain's centuries-long denial of the significance of the nation's involvement in Atlantic slavery, the 2007 bicentennial of British abolition presented an ideal opportunity to redefine the meaning of slavery and abolition in British culture and memory by both addressing the importance of Britain's historical involvement in slavery and the slave trade, and confronting the long-standing denial of the significance of this historical relationship.[9] Among various other events organized to commemorate the event, the bicentennial prompted prominent museums throughout the country to construct new exhibits on slavery and abolition.

In this article I examine one such exhibit, The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum's "Breaking the Chains: The Fight to End Atlantic Slavery," in Bristol. Throughout the long period of the Atlantic slave trade, Bristol's port was rivalled only by London, even surpassing the trade in London for a brief period between 1723 and 1743. Bristol, then, not only played an important role in the slave trade, but the slave trade itself had tremendous consequences for the political, economic, and social development of Bristol.[10] While "Breaking the Chains" was by no means the most extensive of the many museum efforts to recognize the bicentennial, it was short-listed for the prestigious 2008 Art Fund Prize, popularly praised as "ground-breaking," "informative," "hard-hitting," and "authentic," and was said to stress the importance of "endurance, resistance, and survival."[11] I interrogate the narratives of slavery and abolition constructed within this exhibit in an effort to examine whether "Breaking the Chains" contests or confirms, destabilizes or reinforces the established emphasis on Britain's abolitionist lineage. In the end, I hope to demonstrate that the representational practices of this exhibit – particularly within the context of The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum – confirm abolitionism for the ways in which it seemingly illustrates the benevolent nature of the British nation, while distancing or minimizing the significance of the nation's role in slavery. In this

way, the discursive formation of slavery and abolition continues to both inform and invoke the idea(l) of white British benevolence. This enables many Britons to cling to a national identity that is grounded in assumptions about racial whiteness, and to avoid having to confront the ways in which the legacy of slavery (and its abolition) informs contemporary racial tensions, thereby foreclosing the possibility of a comfortable multiculturalism in Britain.[12]

While the scientific basis of race has been thoroughly discredited, it is important to acknowledge the many ways in which this category continues to shape and inform not only tangible experiences of oppression, but also positions of privilege.[13] Though racial discrimination has long been recognized as an important focus of study, attention to sites of racial privilege (namely, white privilege) has only developed significantly in the past fifteen to twenty years. White privilege is perpetuated through an ongoing normalization of whiteness – that is, its ability to exist as unmarked or invisible; thus, whiteness studies works to render the systems of power and privilege perpetuated by this racialized position visible.[14] As Alfred J. López argues, in colonized and formerly colonized societies, "the idea of whiteness as a cultural aesthetic norm combines with the idea of whiteness as a desirable and even necessary trait for colonized subjects who wish to achieve class mobility and financial success."[15] López's concern, then, is with the many ways in which whiteness continues to assert its power in (formerly) colonized cultures. However, when we shift his analysis to consider the contemporary condition of the world's largest colonial power – namely, Britain – we see that the hegemony of whiteness, as López characterizes it, is similarly positioned, though its manifestations may not initially be as obvious.

Discussions of British national identity, according to Bridget Byrne, are one means through which British people talk, implicitly, about race.[16] Thus, there is common acceptance that the identity of 'British,' if not qualified as 'Black British' or 'Asian British,' for example, implies whiteness. In this way, then, whiteness in Britain remains an unmarked category. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues that prescriptive notions of Britishness based on assumptions of whiteness are evident in popular discourse, and have the unfortunate affect of inhibiting the country's ability to deal with the internal transformations of the past sixty years:

> As the enormous structural changes caused by political realignment, economic and social upheavals, and technological revolutions engulf the country… theorists have risen out of the fog in unprecedented numbers to explain all. But

they do so as if they still speak to a homogeneous country, with bedrock shared and understood values and experiences. Politicians pronounce, think tanks think, writers describe, media folk reflect, and others in the establishment confer and thrash out ideas, which are almost always unsustainable because they are based on such limited views and visions about who we are.[17]

The unwillingness to relinquish whiteness as the norm, despite, as Alibhai-Brown observes, the obvious heterogeneity of the country, suggests a general discomfort with the recognition of whiteness as a racialized position of privilege.

The discourse of benevolence is one way in which the reality of white privilege is evaded or denied; unsurprisingly, the idea of benevolence is integral to the national self-conception of various colonial countries. Damien Riggs addresses acts of benevolence in Australia, for example, which he claims are informed by "the practices of nationalism that shape the hegemony of whiteness."[18] When constructed as a nationalist practice, Riggs argues, benevolence represents an effort to "manage the position of the racialized other within white systems of representation."[19] For (white) colonial societies, then, the discourse of benevolence acts to repress or mask the violence of colonization.[20] In the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of benevolence was evident in projects intended to 'uplift' or 'civilize' the indigenous populations of colonized countries; in the contemporary world, benevolence often manifests as the desire for western countries to engage in projects of 'development aid.' Indeed, Barbara Heron argues that development aid projects find their ideological roots in colonial continuities. Heron maintains that the discourse of benevolence, what she describes as "the helping imperative," contains inherently racialized connotations, and that whiteness – specifically, white Northern middle-class subjectivity – is constituted through the notion of doing "what is 'right.'"[21] One of the many problems with this narrative, as Heron acknowledges and as I will demonstrate in the context of British involvement in slavery and abolition, is that in positioning white subjects as perpetual saviours or donors we ignore how exploitative practices of both historical and ongoing colonialism enable the positions of 'donor' and 'recipient.' As Riggs argues, white benevolence "is *always already* an act of white privilege."[22] In this sense, then, the very ability to be benevolent necessitates unequal relations between perceived races of people.

My examination of benevolence and its relationship to British national identity necessarily addresses articulations of this notion in relation to abolition

movements of the nineteenth century. However, my principal focus concerns how the idea(l) of white British benevolence is reproduced in a contemporary project of historical remembrance. History, or what is recorded and represented as an official account of past events, is a troubling concept. For the present purposes, and in order to circumvent the many theoretical challenges to the idea of historical truth, I am working on the basic assumption that no version of the past can ever be wholly inclusive or accurate. In particular, the stories that are used to narrate the history of a nation are heavily influenced by the many ways in which that nation desires to conceive of and represent itself *in the present.* Furthermore, these narratives are informed as much by acts of remembrance as they are by acts of denial – what Benedict Anderson characterizes as "collective amnesia." [23] My interest thus concerns the strategic silences, omissions, and oversights of the "Breaking the Chains" exhibit, and the ways in which such gestures serve to inform and uphold the idea(l) of white British benevolence.

I.

Bristol's "Breaking the Chains: The Fight to End Slavery" ran at The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum (BECM) from April 2007 to October 2008. "Breaking the Chains" consists of six galleries: "What is slavery?", "Africa and Europe", "The Caribbean", "The Age of Abolition", "Voices of the Caribbean", and "An end to slavery?" With only one of its six galleries expressly devoted to abolitionism, the very structure of the exhibit appears to move beyond the conventional privileging of abolition narratives, making a clear attempt to emphasize previously marginalized or neglected perspectives. The "Africa and Europe" gallery brings together diverse textual and artistic displays, as well as historical artefacts, to represent the histories of various African societies. This gallery does not subsume distinct and varied societies to create a general picture of 'Africa,' but rather specifically names, for example, Yoruba, Benin, and Asante peoples, and makes a concerted effort to stress the longevity of these civilizations. Through such techniques, the autonomous status of African peoples prior to their encounters with Europeans is accentuated. The gallery "What is slavery?" constructs the experience of enslavement – from the initial capture of African peoples, through the brutality of the Middle Passage (in this exhibit described as the Atlantic Crossing), to the severity of labour and living conditions on Caribbean plantations

– through a varied and interesting use of artefacts, artistic representations, and the oral and written testimonials of both the enslaved, as well as witnesses to slavery. The economic, cultural, and social costs that African civilizations paid for slavery are considered through an engaging display of textual panels and photographs; however, through the depiction of various revolts, rebellions and other acts of defiance, this gallery also stresses the prevalence of resistance, thereby constituting enslaved peoples as independent, active agents who did not submissively accept their collective fate as slaves. There is, therefore, an obvious effort on the part of curators to construct enslavement as a complex experience, and to do so in a way that acknowledges and seeks to represent perspectives of African peoples.

Similarly, "Breaking the Chains" makes a clear effort to represent emancipation as a complex process. The "Voices of the Caribbean" gallery invokes the testimonials of former slaves to describe the poverty and destitution experienced by many following the abolition of slavery and the detrimental affects of apprenticeship and indentured labour. For example, one large text panel features a quote from a 1842 petition drafted by emancipated slaves: "During our slavery, we was clothed, ration, and seported in all manner of respets. Now we are free mens (free indeed), we are to work for nothing. Then we might actually say, we becomes slaves again [*sic*]." By employing the voices and analyses of black peoples, then, this gallery does not depict emancipation as a simple, painless, or fully redemptive experience. In fact, historian J.R. Oldfield argues that the approach adopted by the museum is indeed "uncompromising," maintaining that although the abolitionists are rightly represented as having laboured to provoke opposition to the slave trade in Britain, the museum's curators have gone to great lengths to "incorporate black voices into their displays."[24] Oldfield thus concludes that the overall emphasis of the exhibit highlights the importance of black agency.

In his analysis of "Breaking the Chains," Oldfield assumes that the incorporation of black perspectives into existing narratives of abolition is an unproblematic process; however, in many ways it is those very narratives which preclude a more historically inclusive representation of slavery. While the representation of black agency in this exhibit certainly effects a more comprehensive picture of slavery than can be found in the abolitionist imagery of the nineteenth century, there is not a rigorous or consistent challenge to many of the fundamental assumptions established through that imagery. Oldfield's analysis, then, is quite accurate: "Breaking the Chains" effectively *incorporates* black

perspectives into the white abolitionist narrative, which is precisely the problem with the exhibit.

For example, the introductory gallery "What is slavery?" features a panel entitled "Fighting Back Against Slavery." While this panel does mention the resistance of enslaved people prior to commenting on the work of abolitionists in Britain, featured directly underneath this text is a well-known abolitionist image, the seal of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST), which features a kneeling black slave imploring a (presumably) white audience, "Am I not a man and a brother?" This image was reproduced widely throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, adorning broaches, medallions, hairpins, and even snuffboxes, inviting the viewer to identify with either the supplicant or the donor. While the accompanying text ("Am I not a man and a brother?") challenges the viewer to recognize the humanity of the enslaved, the representation of the prostrate pleading man suggests that there is a specific hierarchy within this humanity, wherein it is the white audience who is in a position to negotiate the conditions of equality. As Marcus Wood argues, "within the racial dynamic of this print the white power to say yes (which of course implicitly tenders an antithesis, the right to say no) is the necessary pre-condition by which the possibility of black freedom is allowed to be introduced." [25] Freedom, this image suggests, is something that must be both requested and granted; thus, freedom, when and if it comes for the black slave, will be a gift of the benevolent white British nation. The textual privileging of the resistance of the enslaved on this panel, therefore, is compromised by the conflicting connotations of this imagery.

Furthermore, while the seal is clearly an artefact with an important historical relationship to abolitionism, it is not used as an object of analysis. That is, while the image appears at least six times throughout the exhibit, its implications regarding the abolitionists' views of the enslaved are considered only once. Accompanying an image of the kneeling slave upon a conspicuously large piece of stained glass, and following a description of its origins, the exhibit acknowledges that the image suggests the abolitionists "regarded African slaves as helpless victims in need of their assistance." That the meaning of this image is interrogated at all is commendable, particularly when one considers the ways in which it has historically been celebrated. However, this recognition comes almost as an afterthought, and is not used to further discussion or debate regarding its significance. In this way, then, the repeated and largely unproblematized use of the

seal throughout the exhibit reinscribes its aesthetic significance as a celebrated icon, and serves to reproduce the idea of abolition as the charitable donation of white Britain. The perception of Africans as racially different, and indeed primitive or infantile, held by abolitionists themselves is not suggested or considered in any other context, and the forces or beliefs motivating the actions of the abolitionists are likewise left unquestioned in this exhibit.

This is a recurring pattern throughout "Breaking the Chains": the exhibit introduces important aspects of slavery and abolition, but in such a way that reinforces Britain's abolitionist lineage, while distancing the nation from its role in slavery. For example, sexual abuse and exploitation – an omnipresent threat for many slaves – is acknowledged by two different panels, but is neither considered in a meaningful way nor connected to the daily, lived experience of enslavement. Sexual exploitation may have affected women most directly, but, as parents, partners, siblings and members of a community; entire populations experienced the extreme trauma wrought by the threat and practice of sexual abuse. In eliding the centrality of sexual abuse to the experience of enslavement (as well as various ingenious forms of resistance devised by the enslaved), the exhibit whitewashes a critical aspect of slavery. This element is further distanced from the British people by the fact that the perpetrators of such actions are not identified – that is, these routine acts of sexual violence are not attributed to British slaveholders, plantation owners and managers, ship crews, or anyone at all. As the one panel that actually acknowledges the existence of sexual violence states: "Acts of rape and violence went unpunished." There is no reference to either the victims or perpetrators of such acts; we are left to conclude that they simply happened, and, in this way, do not have to contend with how this perpetration of violence contradicts the ideal of British benevolence.

The representation of racism provides another example of the ways in which "Breaking the Chains" sanitizes Britain's history of slavery and abolition. Racism is referred to only four times in the exhibit, and is not portrayed in a way that encourages a sustained or careful consideration of its implications for Atlantic slavery, British abolitionism, or contemporary social relations in Britain. Clearly, racism was in various respects a central ideological aspect enabling slavery, both within the colonies and in Britain itself. However, a racialized view of African peoples also informed the views, actions, and strategies of the abolitionists. This is certainly not to state that all British abolitionists were necessarily racists, in the

sense that this term is used and understood today. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the abolitionists were motivated by forces other than an untainted and uncompromising belief in the equality of all peoples, which encourages a less hagiographic view of abolitionism itself. Because this exhibit leaves the issue of racism largely unexplored, visitors are implicitly invited to read abolitionism as indicative of waning racial attitudes. Indeed, it seems logical to conclude that the abolition of slavery implied a greater acceptance of racial equality. However, while racialized thinking was prevalent throughout the 1700s, the idea of race as a *scientific reality* did not gain popular acceptance until the mid-1800s, long after Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Many scholars thus identify a positive correlation between abolitionism and a more entrenched and prevalent racism in British society. As Felicity Nussbaum argues, the event of abolition "paradoxically exacerbated the racism that had fostered black slavery in England… [and] encouraged racism's evolution into newer, more modern, and more firmly fixed forms of credible fictions."[26]

Similarly, the culture of abolitionism tended to encourage a paternalist, demeaning, and essentially racist view of African peoples – an ideological position central to the nineteenth-century colonial 'scramble for Africa.' As Wood argues, the portrayal of African peoples in abolition propaganda served to justify white imperialism, as African peoples were constructed as in need of the 'uplifting' presence of a white colonial power.[27] This rendition of abolitionism thus afforded ideological justification to an expanding British empire, as it posited Britain as the bearer of civility, justice, and order, establishing the British state as genuinely invested in the interests of Africa, even if such investments necessitated self-sacrifice.[28] When the character of British imperialism came under scrutiny during the first half of the twentieth century, this narrative of abolition proved extremely useful, as it insisted that although the British had been heavily involved in the Atlantic slave trade, "'we had,'" as John R. Seeley wrote, "'published our own guilt, repented of it, and did at last renounce it.'"[29] It is clear that the relationship between racism, slavery, abolition, and colonialism is multifaceted; however, "Breaking the Chains" makes little attempt to initiate discussion, debate, and/or self-reflection concerning these important relationships. Instead, similar to the sexual violence of slavery, the representation of racism is left sufficiently – and reassuringly – vague.

The narratives of slavery and abolition constructed by "Breaking the Chains," then, are not informed solely by the materials that the curators have opted to include, but also by the content and perspectives that have been omitted, evaded, and silenced – that is, those that challenge or undermine the idea(l) of British national benevolence. As John Beech argues, far from encouraging contemporary Britain to contend with the significance of its historical involvement in slavery, exhibits such as "Breaking the Chains" instead serve to further distance the British nation from the 'inconvenient truth' of slavery: "Not only did slavery create massive pain, suffering and misfortune for black people," Beech maintains, "but also enormous gains, financially, socially and politically for the white traders without any apparent moral qualms."[30] White British individuals, with the tacit approval of the white British nation, largely administered such pain, suffering and misfortune. "Breaking the Chains" does not encourage engagement with the idea or significance of British culpability or complicity. For example, while the curators make specific reference to the relationship between Bristol's urban development and the slave trade, this is the single correlation made between the wealth of Britain and the profits of slavery; there is little attempt to interrogate the significance of this economic relationship for historical or contemporary Britain. Thus, through the disavowal of those aspects of slavery and abolition that threaten the idea(l) of British benevolence, the significance of Britain's historical relationship with slavery continues to be effectively mediated through the redemptive lens of abolition.

The emphasis of the exhibit is made quite clear, in fact, by the very first set of panels, which introduce "Breaking the Chains" as "An Exhibition to Commemorate the British Parliamentary Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807":

> This exhibition tells the story of the British Transatlantic Slave Trade and its abolition… Campaigners in Britain, fired by humanitarian and religious ideals, worked tirelessly for many years to have this brutal trade abolished. The Transatlantic Slave Trade, but not slavery, was outlawed by an Act of Parliament in 1807. Slavery in British colonies was finally abolished in 1834. In 2007 we remember the courage and strength of all those who fought and campaigned against slavery – in Africa, Britain and the Caribbean.

The exhibit, then, is not simply meant to commemorate the abolition of slavery *simpliciter*, but the British Parliamentary abolition of slavery, and what 'we' ought to remember is not that Britain participated and benefitted from slavery, but rather

those who fought to have it extinguished. In these ways, the dominant message conveyed by "Breaking the Chains" echoes that of the nineteenth century: abolition was achieved by the British, who then selflessly proceeded to induce the rest of the world to follow suit. For example, in the final gallery, "An end to slavery?" a series of three panels are devoted to the celebration of Britain's worldwide "policing of the slave trade," which eventually led to the "defeat of slavery." The panels emphasize that policing the trade entailed tremendous sacrifice on the part of the British nation, which undertook this activity despite the extraordinary financial strain and loss of British lives that ensued. These panels follow "The Age of Abolition" gallery, the whole of which is devoted to the rehearsal of familiar narratives of abolitionism in Britain, listing the contributions of individuals such as Olaudah Equiano alongside those of William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson. Thus, while the narrative of abolition has shifted, as Oldfield argued, to incorporate black perspectives, the overall emphasis continues to foreground Britain's primary and continuing role in abolition, which warrants ample space and consideration, while an engaged consideration of the acts and consequences of Britain's much longer participation in slavery is discounted. What this suggests is that British society need not feel any sense of responsibility for the past, but is, as Priyamvada Gopal argues, "allowed, indeed exhorted to feel pride in it. We are to distance ourselves from those who actively participated in slavery, but we can rightfully claim an abolitionist lineage."[31]

An appeal to Britain's abolitionist lineage is also evident in the ways in which "Breaking the Chains" constructs the contemporary relevance of Britain's historical involvement in slavery and abolition exclusively through Britain's continuing acts of benevolence. In the final gallery, "An end to slavery?", a series of textual panels describe British efforts to end slavery in East and West Africa, Turkey, Egypt, and Persia; British challenges to the colonial exploits of the Spanish in South America; and British opposition to the horrific conditions in King Leopold's ill-named Congo Free State. The gallery questions whether slavery exists in Britain today (for the most part the answer is no, though rising incidences of trafficking and forced labour are acknowledged), and concludes with a set of three large panels paying tribute to people working in countries where slavery continues to exist as a genuine social problem: India, the Philippines, and Sudan. This gallery does not suggest that Britain's involvement in slavery carried on past the Abolition Act of 1807, as Marika Sherwood revealed, nor does it mention that it was *1928*

before slavery was actually abolished in all British colonies.[32] There is no reference to the imperial conquests of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or the deleterious consequences of British colonization – the effects of which continue to resonate in former colonies. Instead, the British are depicted as a people who have, since their moral awakening of the early nineteenth century, worked tirelessly to render the world more equitable and accepting, while the social injustice of slavery is construed as an issue that is only perpetrated by, or in, other societies – societies the British are doing their best to help. What this final gallery implies is that in order to understand the consequences or legacy of slavery, one must simply be made aware of the problem of slavery in the contemporary world. In fact, throughout the exhibit, the implications of Britain's involvement in slavery for contemporary society – that is, its lasting influence within various institutions, ideologies, and social relations – are ignored. A summary quotation acknowledging the "ignorance and discrimination" faced by large waves of West Indians who relocated to Britain following the Second World War is the closest this exhibit comes to suggesting an ideological correlation between the racial ideologies used to justified Britain's historical involvement in slavery and the discrimination faced by racialized peoples in contemporary society. Current ethnic tensions and racist attitudes in Britain are not mentioned, much less connected with the legacy of slavery. Likewise, the exhibit neither acknowledges the cultural and institutional distancing from Britain's involvement in slavery, nor does it consider what is signified by this collective denial. There is, to state it simply, very little information to indicate why the nation's involvement in slavery should be of any concern to British citizens.

Despite the exhibit's patent lack of engagement with the contemporary relevance of Britain's involvement in slavery, there are posters throughout the BECM advertising a debate organized and facilitated by the museum concerning whether Britain should formally apologize for its role in slavery and the slave trade. However, the museum also displays several articles published in the local and national presses opposing the idea of an official apology. Such opposition is expressed in the comments left by one visitor in the response book: "Apologise to whom? It is so far in the past, and WE instigated the freedom," beside which is pencilled in, presumably by another visitor, "so true." Another visitor wrote: "This was tribe against tribe. Africans sold each other," while yet another emphatically stated, "SLAVERY WAS JUST BUSINESS." Indeed, if one's sole source on slavery

and abolition consisted of this exhibit, these would arguably be reasonable conclusions, as British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade is not effectively or constructively examined. In fact, in discursively privileging Britain's historical relationship to abolitionism, "Breaking the Chains" insinuates that the country need not assume responsibility – through acts of acknowledgement, apology, and redress – for something that the British themselves worked so hard to abolish.

II.

The context in which this exhibit is constructed further lends to the sense of an unselfconscious celebration of white British benevolence.[33] "Breaking the Chains," as an exhibit in the BECM, requires visitors to walk through several permanent galleries on the first floor. The prelude to this temporary exhibit marking British abolitionism is thus a permanent series of images, texts, and artefacts harkening back to the glory days of empire. Despite the museum's professed purpose – to examine the "evidence of Britain's colonial history" and to consider this history's "present-day legacy" – the collection of items and accompanying text lacks consistent critique regarding what the imposition of British rule meant to millions of colonized people worldwide. While the museum makes a clear effort to employ diverse perspectives to construct varied experiences of colonization, a number of highly significant figures are missing. The overall message, then, is confusing and contradictory, and does not achieve the sense of critical engagement one would expect from a museum dedicated to the exposition of such a devastating and long-lasting system of exploitation. For example, though there are a number of panels featuring colonial India, none mention the figure of Mahatma Gandhi, his beliefs or philosophies, or his importance to India's independence movements. In fact, the importance of India's protracted struggle for independence is neglected almost entirely. Another panel states, "pious, dutiful and fertile, Queen Victoria was the perfect mother-figure" for a growing "imperial family." The museum makes no effort to destabilize this euphemistic rhetoric, and, as a consequence, the status of the Queen is realigned with the notion of imperial benevolence. To diminish the historical significance of India's decolonization, or to refer to a vast and varied expanse of territory and peoples dominated and governed through violence, manipulation, and coercion as a "family" constructs what is, at best, a highly selective interpretation regarding the significance of British colonialism.

A large textual panel entitled "Law and order: colonial policing and the legal system", which explains the introduction of British civility and governance to the colonies, typifies the presumption of British superiority implicit in the discursive constitution of imperialism throughout the BECM:

> The British established the rule of law in their colonies. The courts used a mix of English law with local customs and traditional beliefs… The British avoided interfering with customary law in the colonies. They banned practices deemed contrary to natural justice such as human sacrifice and infanticide. But they respected local beliefs, especially in disputes about land, debt, marriage and inheritance.

This panel effects several extremely troubling insinuations regarding British colonialism. First, the panel subsumes the numerous societies that the British colonized under the general descriptor of "British colony." There is no recognition of the tremendous diversity of theses societies, as their importance is constructed to exist exclusively through their status as a colony of the British. Second, the panel suggests that these societies lacked a cohesive "rule of law" prior to the arrival of the British: the "colonies" had only "local customs and traditional beliefs," which apparently did not constitute a cohesive or capable system of governance. British customs and beliefs are deployed as "law" and associated with "natural justice," thereby legitimizing their universal applicability, while the customs and beliefs of the indigenous peoples are portrayed as little more than superstitions or folk traditions. Third, this panel further debases the "customs and beliefs" of indigenous peoples by very generally correlating them with human sacrifice and infanticide. The museum's referencing of these practices with no indication of their specific cultural or historical contexts invites the visitor to conclude that such practices were in fact common in "the colonies." Finally, the panel goes to great lengths to stress the respect that the British extended to all but the most barbaric "local customs and beliefs," implying that British law brought civility and order to the savage colonies, and did so with the utmost esteem for all local customs and beliefs that the British deemed acceptable. In much the same way that "Breaking the Chains" distances the British nation from complicity in the horrors of slavery, the museum upholds the notion that Britain's relationship with its colonies was distinguished first and foremost by a sense of charitable responsibility, while the critical significance of oppression, coercion, and condescension to British colonialism is absent.

The BECM's portrayal of the relationship between imperialism, slavery, and abolition is also perplexing. Within the permanent galleries, Britain's role in the Atlantic slave trade is hastily represented, primarily through a large glassed display of slave-related artefacts such as whips, shackles, and chains.[34] While Wood argues that the exhibition of such objects "as if they are precious archaeological treasure" serves to position slavery at a comfortable distance from the present, the museum has at least attempted to situate Britain's relationship to slavery in the larger context of imperialism.[35] "Breaking the Chains," on the other hand, does not consider slavery or abolition in the context of imperialism. The result is a troubling disconnect within the museum, as visitors are forced to enter and exit the temporary exhibit through the permanent galleries, and it is unclear how Britain's ongoing imperialism follows from or is related to the abolition of the slave trade. In fact, as previously remarked, one leaves "Breaking the Chains" with the impression that the end of slavery signified an end to British oppression and the dawning of a new era of British philanthropy. Implicitly, then, this gesture construes imperialism as an aspect of British benevolence, effectively perpetuating the idea(l) of white British benevolence.

Chris Weedon argues that in the context of contemporary British culture, various aspects of Britain's imperial past are either overtly celebrated or subject to selective amnesia – an argument that is well illustrated by this museum's exhibitions.[36] The narratives of imperialism rehearsed by the BECM suggest that while the empire may have constituted a somewhat dysfunctional imperial family, it was a family nonetheless. This attitude is reinforced by an introductory panel describing the Commonwealth as a "voluntary association of 54 independent states" that "emerged from countries that were part of the empire." The panel offers no consideration of the factors inducing and/or compelling newly "independent" states to retain ties to Britain. Visitors are left to conclude that former colonies simply desired to preserve such connections; and, if they desired such relations, then the experience of empire as a British colony must not have been so bad after all. Similar to the strategic silences prevalent in "Breaking the Chains," the constitution of British imperialism in the museum's permanent galleries involves key elisions and implicit denials. The history and significance of British imperialism is largely sanitized and sanctified, and the general milieu of the museum serves as a fitting example of what Paul Gilroy describes as Britain's postcolonial melancholy, a sort of nostalgic longing for the bygone years of British

global hegemony.[37] This sense of melancholy is also evident in the museum's gift shop, which offers various replicas of 'historical' artwork testifying to the amicable relations between the British and their colonies. There are also multiple items available for children, including books with titles reflecting, rather than challenging, the euro-centrism of colonialism, such as "Columbus Discovers America Colouring Book" or "Little Woodlands Indian Girl Paper Doll."

It stands to reason that many visitors to the BECM would be perfectly comfortable with the museum's celebratory constructions of abolitionism and its nostalgic memories of a mythical imperial family. However, other visitors expressed grave misgivings concerning the rationales informing both the museum's representation of slavery and abolitionism, as well as its portrayal of British imperialism. As one self-identified "slave descendent from the Caribbean" wrote of "Breaking the Chains" in the visitor book,

> This is a small gesture towards the very long, deep suffering of the Blacks of this world. A gesture that does not fully do justice or enough to redress or rectify the grave effects that impacted the descendents of slavery. The truth is there for all to see and to research. Why then do the British ruling classes who benefited from slavery and still do, refuse to or avoid offering the African world an apology for this atrocity?

Another "African American female" wrote,

> I applaud the attempt to recognize Britain's place in the institution of slavery. However, a museum whose purpose is to "Commemorate Abolition" (the quote in bold letters at the entrance of your museum) is not the best place to start… Are you celebrating African culture or are you subtly defending the institution of slavery and its profitable advantage? I'm extremely confused by the intentions and the purpose of this museum and I would rather you sweep this subject under the rug for all eternity than to make a mockery of my ancestors as you have done.

Still another visitor stated that "Breaking the Chains" makes a "spectacle out of one of the worst human atrocities in our history," while the museum, in general, is "offensive and patronizing." Indeed, as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill writes, research conducted within ethnic communities in England reveals that many individuals feel their histories are marginalized or excluded within museums, which are accused of operating according to a "colonial view of the past."[38] This is certainly true of the BECM, where the histories of slavery, abolition, and British imperialism are not considered significant for their effects on enslaved, emancipated, or

colonized populations – and, by extension, the descendents of these populations, many of whom are British citizens – but rather are constructed to validate and reinforce a sense of white British benevolence.

Thus, both the temporary "Breaking the Chains" exhibit, and the permanent galleries of the BECM fail to either destabilize the celebratory tradition of abolition, or to redress the collective amnesia surrounding Britain's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Yes, both the offence of slavery and the fact of empire are acknowledged, and, for many British citizens, these may be quite surprising revelations. But the frameworks within which they are represented reaffirm conventional narratives of Britishness. In this sense, then, abolition is still not valued as a movement for social justice or racial equality, and hence one that was contested and fraught, but represented as Britain's *gift* of freedom to enslaved peoples. Britain is constructed as a benevolent *giver* of freedom of all kinds, whether it is through the gift of abolition to its slaves, the gift of law and good governance to its imperial subjects, or the gift of independence to its colonies. The fact that Britain was complicit in creating the very conditions enabling them to bestow such gifts is not acknowledged, and the idea(l) of white British benevolence prevails.

III.

In this concluding section, I want return to the quotation with which I began in order to make a more focused argument regarding the importance of history to contemporary notions of identity and belonging, and then move to suggest how important cultural media, such as museums, may approach these histories in more socially productive ways. Marcus Wood contends, "what we remember is defined by what we choose to forget, and how we choose to remember is defined by how we choose to ignore."[39] In foregrounding the idea of choice, it is clear that the act of forgetting is not necessarily due to inadvertent oversights or omissions. It is predicated, rather, on concerted elisions of problematic or discomforting aspects of history in an attempt to substantiate particular views of identity. The rehearsal of these narratives affords critical insight into the ways in which a nation imagines and sustains a particular sense of its self, as ideas and ideals of national identity at once inform and are informed by the multiple meanings, assumptions, and values denoted in the discursive formation of a nation's history.

López suggests that, in the early twenty-first century, "there remains… a *postcolonial* whiteness struggling to come into being, or rather a number of post-empire, post-mastery whitenesses attempting to examine themselves in relation to histories of oppression and hegemony of their others."[40] My objective throughout this article has been to demonstrate that far from providing a critical engagement with this traumatic aspect of British history, the construction of slavery and abolition in the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in fact re-produces the idea(l) of white British benevolence and the position of Britain as the historical subject in its own narrative of salvation. In this sense, then, there is little attempt to reckon with either the historical or the ongoing hegemony of whiteness; what is evident, rather, is a concerted effort to reassert the longevity of Britain's benevolent character.

Britain's involvement in slavery admittedly poses a particular problem for the narrative of white benevolence; thus, in order to maintain this narrative, it is not only convenient, but, indeed, quite necessary to distance the nation from this history. However, if Britain does aspire to realize a genuine practice of multiculturalism, as *The Parekh Report* suggests, then it is critical to forgo the discourse of white benevolence in order to create the space for a more inclusive conception of Britishness. In doing so, Britain must find a way not merely to *accommodate* the historical perspectives of all its contemporary citizenry, but rather render them central to the narratives that shape and inform the meaning of Britishness. This requires an abdication of the euphemistic language employed by cultural venues such as the BECM in order to candidly identify the historical role of Britain as conqueror, oppressor, and enslaver. This also requires the acknowledgement, as Gilroy emphatically points out, that the history of slavery is not the "special property" of blacks, but rather is an integral part of the "ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole."[41]

In the context of a museum exhibit, the most constructive way to account for the persistent denial of slavery in Britain is to use it to exemplify the established ways in which remembrance has hitherto been enacted. This provides opportunities to explore important connections between this denial and existing ideals of British identity. An exhibit dedicated to traumatic and contentious experiences should not reinforce existing interpretations of these issues through customary tropes of representation, but rather should destabilize visitor expectations, and actively seek to provoke a sense of unfamiliarity and discomfort.

"Breaking the Chains," for example, could be altered to include a more reflective consideration of the ways in which the exhibit itself perpetuates the idea(l) of white British benevolence by sustaining celebratory narratives of Britain's role in abolition, while denying or mitigating the significance of Britain's role in slavery. Such an act would also enable a critical confrontation with the many ways in which representations of British history function to reproduce the conflation of Britishness with whiteness. The traditional construction of authority is thus undermined by the museum's willingness to reflect on problematic aspects of its own representational practices; moreover, the illusory expectation that visitors will exit the museum with a complete or definitive account of slavery or abolition is challenged in the hopes that visitors will come to understand that there is no definitive account of this past. Museums and visitors are then forced to recognize their own roles in the discursive production of these historical accounts.

Furthermore, a critical element of any attempt to represent Britain's involvement in Atlantic slavery demands that its relevance to British society, in both the past and the present, be rendered explicit. Exhibits such as "Breaking the Chains" construct Atlantic slavery as an episode that a contemporary 'we' can point to as an *historical* travesty of justice, congratulating ourselves in the process for the more enlightened western world that 'we' have since accomplished. However, the 'progress' of the western world has in many ways been achieved through the tremendous sacrifices of others, often with little thought given as to how progress is defined. As Kowaleski Wallace argues, an engaged and socially meaningful construction of Britain's relationship to slavery thus requires the situation of moral agents – those who have learned "how personal choices have invisible repercussions on a global scale and who become both more self-reflective and politically proactive as a result." [42] This also involves the exploration of individuals whose personal choices brought about powerful repercussions, yet who opted to proceed in spite of professed views and values that ideologically demanded quite a different course of action.

The act of situating moral agents does not require a contemporary audience to empathize with a historically, racially, or culturally distant 'other,' as such an exercise is fraught with troublesome implications regarding the ways in which we imagine ourselves in relation to an 'object' of empathy. What is necessary, rather, is an interrogation of the social, economic, and ideological conditions that enabled

the systematic exploitation of people, in an effort to recognize the contemporary currency of such conditions. As Kowaleski Wallace maintains,

> It is a mistake to think that we live 'after' those who came before us; we live *with* them on a historical continuum that links our behaviors to theirs and allows us to learn from them. Thus, the question is not whether we assume their guilt but whether we learn valuable moral lessons through our connectedness to them.[43]

In effect, then, the identification of moral agents makes two related demands: firstly, that a contemporary 'we' – specifically, a contemporary western 'we' – acknowledge the full implications of our connectedness to the past, rather than selectively drawing upon those aspects of a historical narrative that serve to validate particular interpretations of national identity; and secondly, that individuals, institutions, and nations not only accept slavery as a disgraceful act of social injustice, but also seek to identify the ways in which this legacy is inherited by the contemporary world. This involves a critical destabilization of the discourse of white benevolence, not only for Britain, but also for all countries that participated in slavery and the slave trade. To confront the historical conditions out of which so-called first and third world countries were created is to relinquish the notion that the western world is engaged in acts of benevolence through, for example, development aid projects, as we are forced to contend with the multiple ways in which we create the very conditions necessary to position ourselves as 'saviours' through everyday complicity in *ongoing* structures of social and racial injustices. Indeed, the very ability to be benevolent, as Riggs argues, "is always already predicated upon the power to do so – it does not require the challenging or giving up of power, but rather is reliant upon an imbalance of power in order to instantiate the categories of giver and receiver." [44] Acknowledging our connectedness to the past demands that the de-contextualized rhetoric of benevolence, aid, and development – indebted to colonial notions of uplifting, educating, or civilizing the 'savages' – be abandoned, in order to understand these projects as necessary acts of redress and restitution.

At the entrance to "Breaking the Chains," set among the pictures of abolition's 'heroes' – Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Equiano – is a large text panel featuring a 1937 quotation from former slave William Prescott: "They will

remember that we were sold, but they won't remember that we were strong. They will remember that we were bought, but not that we were brave." The import of this quotation is particularly ironic, as the denial of slavery in Britain's collective memory is partially attributable to the very narratives upheld by exhibits such as "Breaking the Chains." That said, I want to make the following points very clear: I am not suggesting that those individuals and organizations who did work extremely hard for the abolitionist cause should not be acknowledged for their efforts; or that all those who visit "Breaking the Chains" ought to emerge with a clear and consistent message regarding slavery and abolition; or that combating present-day slavery is not an urgent issue. However, I do think that it is worth questioning why (two hundred years after the fact) institutions such as The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum continue to resist a more critical and comprehensive examination of both the historical events of Atlantic slavery and British abolitionism, as well as the ways in which these histories are culturally remembered.

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[1] *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report (*London: Profile Books, 2000), viii.

[2] For the sake of clarity, throughout this article I will use the term 'racialized' to refer to people who are perceived and defined as not white. Though I recognize the problematic ways in which this may be seen to re-centre whiteness as normative, it should become clear throughout this article that I am attempting to do the very opposite – that is, to expose and destabilize implicit assumptions of white superiority.

[3] While there are contentious debates surrounding the differing significations of 'British' and 'English' identities, throughout this article, I will follow *The Parekh Report* in my use of 'British' or 'Britishness.' For an introductory exposition of these identities, see Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddar, "Nationalism Beyond the Nation-State," in *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*, Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddar, eds. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

[4] See Marika Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade After 1807* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007).

[5] Madge Dresser, "Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London," *History Workshop Journal* 64.1 (Autumn, 2007): 176.

[6] G. B. K. "On Negro Emancipation," *The Commemorative Wreath, In Celebration of the Extinction of Negro Slavery in the British Dominions* (London: J. Masters, 173, Printer, Aldersgate Street, 1834), 17-20.

[7] For an insightful analysis concerning the representation of Britain's "gift" of freedom to enslaved people in art and literature, see Marcus Wood, "Emancipation Art, Fanon, and the 'Butchery of Freedom,'" in *Slavery and the Cultures of Abolition: Essays Marking the Bicentennial of the British Abolition Act of 1807*, Brycchan Carey and Peter J. Kitson, eds. (Cambridge: The English Association, 2007).

[8] Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, *The British Slave Trade and Public Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5.

[9] Ross Wilson, "Memory matters: Britain and the abolition of the slave trade, 1807-2007," *1807 Commemorated: The Abolition of the Slave Trade* (University of York, 2007 [accessed September 2008]). Available from http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/discussion/memory.html.

[10] For a thorough analysis of Bristol's role in the Atlantic slave trade, see Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London: Continuum, 2001).

[11] *Abolition 200: The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act*, (accessed October 2008). Available from http://www.abolition200.org.uk/listings/EDR42153.html; Culture 24 (accessed October 2008). Available from http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/art54179; "Shortlist announced for the Art Fund Museums and Galleries Prize," 24 Hour Museum, (accessed October 2008). Available from http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/ixbin/hix?_IXFIRST_=3&_IXMAXHITS_=1&_IXSPFX_=search/full_g fx/&_IXSS_=_IXFIRST_%3d1%26%2524sort%2b%2540descending%2bart_publish_date%3d%252e%26% 2524%2528news%2bor%2bexhibition%2529%2bin%2bart_section%2bindex%2btext_wp2%3d%252e%26 _IXSESSION_%3dI6E236MNP81%26%257bSIMPLE%257d_%257band%257d%2524%253f%253a%2524%3 dbristol%2bbreaking%2bthe%2bchains%26_IXmode%3dgfx_en&_IXSR_=Q5QjDTZadLz&_IXSESSION_ =I6E236MNP81&_IXmode=gfx_en&submit-button=summary

[12] While *The Parekh Report* assumes the desirability of multiculturalism, the limitations to this social model are many. For example, see Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia Press, 2005); Elizabeth Buettner, "'Going for an Indian': South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain," *The Journal of Modern History* 80.4 (December 2008): 865-901.

[13] Damien Riggs, "'We don't talk about race anymore': Power, privilege, and critical whiteness studies," Borderlands e-journal 3.2 (2004): para. 3. Available from http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/riggs_intro.htm.

[14] See, for example, Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[15] Alfred J López, "Whiteness After Empire," *in Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, Alfred J. López, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17. On the desire for whiteness, see also Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[16] Bridget Byrne, "Crisis of Identity? Englishness, Britishness, and Whiteness," in *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*, Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddar, eds. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 139.

[17] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (London: The Penguin Press, 2000), 10.

[18] Damien Riggs, "Benevolence and the Management of Stake: On Being 'Good White People," *Philament: A Journal of the Arts and Culture* 4 (August 2004): para. 4. Available from http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue4_Critique_Riggs.htm.

[19] Riggs, "Benevolence and the Management of Stake": para. 4.

[20] Riggs, "Benevolence and the Management of Stake": para. 11.

[21] Barbara Heron, *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender, and the Helping Imperative* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007), 6-9.

[22] Riggs, "Benevolence and the Management of Stake," para. 10, my emphasis.

[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 204.

[24] J. R. Oldfield, *'Chords of Freedom,' Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 127-129.

[25] Wood, "Emancipation Art," 22.

[26] Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 238.

[27] Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

[28] Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 8.

[29] John R. Seeley, as cited in Brown, 8.

[30] John Beech. "A step forwards or a step sideways? Some personal reflections of how the presentation of slavery has (and hasn't) changed in the last few years," *1807 Commemorated: The Abolition of the Slave Trade* (University of York, 2007 [accessed September 2008]). Available from http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/exhibitions/museums/step.html.

[31] Priyamvada Gopal, "It is contradictory to condemn slavery and yet celebrate the empire," *The Guardian*, (2 April 2007 [accessed December 2008]). Available from http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/apr/02/comment.race.

[32] Britain's act of 1833 abolished slavery in the Caribbean, Cape Town, and Canada. It was not until 1843 that legislation was passed to initiate abolition in British India, and slavery remained legal in Britain's Gold Coast until 1928. Sherwood, 1-2.

[33] My intent here is not to offer a sustained review of the museum itself, but only to convey my impressions regarding the significance of the "Breaking the Chains" exhibit in such a museum.

[34] Abolition is also represented in the main part of the museum, in a gallery called "The Humanitarian Impulse," which follows the exit to the "Breaking the Chains" exhibit.

[35] Marcus Wood, "Atlantic Slavery and Traumatic Representation in Museums: The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum as a Test Case," *Slavery and Abolition*, 29(2), (June 2008): 158.

[36] Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging* (New York: Open University Press, 200), 26.

[37] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 90.

[38] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Routledge: London, 2000), 7.

[39] Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 145.

[40] López, 6.

[41] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 39.

[42] Kowaleski Wallace, 27.

[43] Kowaleski Wallace, 208.

[44] Damien Riggs, "Constructing the national good: Howard and the rhetoric of benevolence." Refereed paper presented to the Australasion Political Science Association Conference, University of Adelaide, 2004, 8.